



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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SPENCE WARNS OF WORSENING MILITARY READINESS

U.S. Representative Floyd Spence (R-SC), Chairman of the House National Security Committee, released a report today warning that the combination of declining defense resources, a smaller military force structure and increasing peacekeeping and humanitarian operations are causing serious readiness problems for all of the military services, presaging a return to the hollow forces of the 1970s.

The report – *Military Readiness 1997: Rhetoric and Reality* – highlights a range of readiness problems, many of which were identified through interviews conducted last fall with hundreds of military personnel from all ranks and from all services.

“In Washington, ‘official’ reports seem to indicate that there is no military readiness problem, although for several years now, we have been told that the services are on the ‘razor’s edge’ of readiness. But the fact is that you cannot sit on a razor without bleeding, and military readiness is beginning to hemorrhage.

“The reality is that years of declining defense budgets, a smaller force structure, fewer personnel and aging equipment coupled with an increase in the number of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations are stretching U.S. military forces to the breaking point. Doing more with less may be the military’s new motto, but it is not a sustainable strategy nor is it conducive to ensuring the long-term preparedness of an all-volunteer force,” Spence said.

The report is being released as the Department of Defense continues with its Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), assessing America’s defense needs to better define the proper size, structure and role of the armed forces.

“It is critical that those in the Administration charged with conducting the QDR not rely on faulty readiness assumptions,” said Spence. “The QDR must confront head on the reality that the military services face problems beyond just their ability to adequately modernize aging equipment. They face readiness problems that are, in the long-term, more serious than the massive underfunding of the procurement accounts. Deeper cuts in the services’ endstrength and force structure in the absence of a significant scaling back of operational requirements will only ensure a return to a hollow military.”

Spence summarizes the report's findings into "four readiness realities":

- Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are working harder and longer to execute their peacetime missions due to an inherent tension between personnel and resource shortages and an increased pace of operations. Military personnel and their families are paying an increasingly higher human price from repeatedly being asked to "do more with less;"
- The quantity and quality of combat training is being compromised, particularly training for the most demanding mission – to fight and win tomorrow's high-intensity wars;
- The quality of military life continues to erode to the point where a growing number of talented and dedicated military personnel and their families are questioning the desirability of a life in uniform; and
- Military equipment is aging prematurely due to extended use and reduced maintenance. Decreased budgets and the increased pace of operations has begun to affect the reliability and availability of existing equipment inventories.

"Taken together, these readiness problems will continue to seriously erode the preparedness of U.S. armed forces," said Spence. "The already destructive mismatches between strategy, forces and resources are worsening."

Among the evidence of a deepening readiness problems cited in the report:

- Army force structure contains a "phantom division's" worth of unmanned infantry squads. 125 infantry squads across the Army have *no* personnel assigned to them, equaling a division's worth of infantry fighting power that is hollow. Similar shortages exist in the Army's armored and mechanized force structure;
- Units rotating through the military training centers (NTC, Nellis, Twentynine Palms) are arriving and leaving less prepared than in the past. The result is that most units are less ready to execute the demands of high-intensity warfare than in years past;
- Due to parts shortages and maintenance shortfalls, the rate of aircraft cannibalization – stripping parts from usable aircraft to keep others flying – is on the rise. One Navy pilot reported that when aircraft return from deployment, mechanics begin stripping parts off before the pilots can get out of the aircraft. At other bases, readiness standards are being manipulated through the rotation of cannibalized parts from aircraft to aircraft to avoid triggering readiness reporting requirements;
- Two-thirds of all housing in the military inventory is classified as inadequate by the Defense Science Board. The average age of barracks and dormitories is over 40 years. In Europe, 92 percent of Army family housing is considered inadequate, over half of which has not been renovated since the 1950s;

- The combination of decreased maintenance budgets and increased use has begun to degrade the Air Force tactical fighter fleet, in particular F-15s and F-16s. As of last Fall, F-15E mission capable rates dropped below 80 percent for the first time in 7 years, and exceeded the “out of supply” and “out of maintenance” standards for the first time since 1980;
- Maintaining adequate combat proficiency has become a virtual impossibility for some units, particularly Army and Air Force units supporting or engaged in peacekeeping and no fly zone operations. For units on such deployments, road marching in Bosnia or patrolling no fly zones provides little tactical training benefit. Compounding the problem, the units remaining behind are being stripped of people, parts, equipment and funds in order to address shortfalls in deploying units;
- The decline in military quality of life is approaching a state of crisis. The combination of poor pay and benefits, reduced health care, inadequate housing, longer family separations and dramatically increased workload due to increased operations and personnel shortages have created a volatile mix of factors that are guaranteed to drive quality personnel from military service; and
- Recruits entering the military are less prepared, fit and motivated than in the past. Army studies indicate that the rate at which recruits are failing standard physical fitness tests has increased to 30 percent – triple the Army’s overall failure rate.

“The declining state of readiness raises the age-old question of ‘readiness for what,’” said Spence. “If the question is ready to conduct peacekeeping missions, today’s military, at an alarmingly high cost, is ready. However, if the question is ready and available to execute the National Military Strategy, the answer is decidedly unclear, which has disturbing implications for the nation as we head into the 21st century.”

The report is a follow-up to a 1994 readiness report released by Spence entitled *Military Readiness: The View from the Field*.

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